

Religiosity in *masa Lui Brâncuși* by Valeriu Anania

The Translation and Analysis

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Abstract— Valeriu Anania created a poetic artwork to integrate and represent part of the Romanian cultural heritage. The title of the poem this article seeks to analyze, *Masalui Brâncuși* translated as 'The table of Brâncuși' makes reference to part of the sculptural Ensemble of Constantin Brâncuși, *Masatăcerii* translated as: 'The table of silence'. The sculpted table, as well as the rest of the elements included in the Ensemble of Brâncuși, has been created as an homagial monument honoring the heroes of the First World War. Some researchers believe that Brâncuși's sculptures carry a more profound symbolism, a Christian codification. Valeriu Anania transliterates Constantin Brâncuși's sculpted artwork into a religious literary masterpiece. His representation of the sculpture through verse resembles a frame narrative. Just as Brâncuși encoded a certain symbolism safeguarded by the sculptures apparent signification, Anania encoded the religious element, decoding the symbolism encoded by Brâncuși. This article seeks to bring light upon Valeriu Anania's poem *Masalui Brâncuși*, focusing on the de-codification of religious elements. It also means to provide the literary stage with a translated version of the text from Romanian language into English language and with its analysis. Valeriu Anania created a poetic artwork to integrate and represent part of the Romanian cultural heritage. This article seeks to translate and analyze the poem, *Masalui Brâncuși*, translated as 'The table of Brâncuși' which makes reference to part of the sculptural Ensemble of Constantin Brâncuși, *Masatăcerii* translated as 'The table of silence'. The sculpted table, as well as the rest of the elements included in the Ensemble of Brâncuși had been created as an homagial monument honoring the heroes of the First World War. Some researchers believe that Brâncuși's sculptures carry a more profound symbolism, a Christian codification. Valeriu Anania transliterated Constantin Brâncuși's sculpted artwork into a religious literary masterpiece. His representation of the

sculpture through verse resembles a frame narrative. Just as Brâncuși encoded a certain symbolism, safeguarded by the sculptures apparent signification, Anania encoded the religious element, representing his own interpretation of the symbolism encoded by Brâncuși. This article seeks to bring light upon Valeriu Anania's poem *Masalui Brâncuși*, focusing on the de-codification of the religious elements.

Keywords— Poetry, Religion, Translation, Analysis, Symbolism, Valeriu Anania.

The religious element is found in Valeriu Anania's literary work since his debut as a writer, poet and playwright. He published the poem *Pământ și Cer*¹ in 1935 within the *Ortodoxia* journal, while still being a student of the Bucharest Central Seminary (Băgiu 2006: 57). He lived his life as a monk, part of the Christian orthodox clergy, he was a playwright, novelist, essayist but most importantly, a poet. The poet was not one to follow a literary trend (Stir 2011:8) or bow to the requests of social norms, therefore his work cannot be included into a specific literary movement. Although he believed in the freedom of the intellectual, indifferent of the collective literary fashion, as according to Liviu Petrescu, 'the writer, in any case, in order to construct a metaphysics, does not allow himself to deviate, not by a whit, from the teachings of the church...' (Băgiu 2006:58-59).² As punishment for his free intellectual spirit, the communist dictatorship (Ceaușescu regime) ruling Romania during that time, jailed him for a period of six years (1958-1964), on the grounds of conspiracy against the government. During his incarceration in the Aiud and Jilava prisons, Anania created one of his most renowned plays, written in verse, *Meșterul Manole*, demonstrating the ability to create an entire dramaturgy, through memorization, although experiencing the utmost horrific circumstances of

¹ (trans) Heaven and Earth

² „scriitorul nu își permite nicăieri să se abată nici măcar cu o iotă de la învățătura bisericii, pentru a-și construi o metafizică...”

a communist jail. His fundamental literary work remains the new edition of the Bible, translated into the Romanian language, in which, according to Patriarch Teoctist, he 'facilitates the understanding of the Bible books, enriching the text with introductions and an abundance of notes and commentaries clarifying the sacred text' (Anania 2009:6).³ Thus, it is significant to observe his Christian Orthodox theological literary pattern (Bâgiu 2006:57), beginning with his literary debut in *Ortodoxia* journal and finally, his swansong, the Bible 'the version corrected according to the Septuagint, written, variorum and printed by Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania...' (Anania 2009:3).⁴ He undertook an extensive effort, working intensively for over a decade, offering the Romanian cultural stage as well as the people, a Biblical text, proving, through annotations and examples of translation differences, the contrasts between various translations of the sacred text (Septuagint, Hebrew/Aramaic Version, King James version etc).

The richness of the archaic and monastic expressivity in Anania's work traces to the influence of his collaborator and friend, Tudor Arghezi, as argued by Lucian Bâgiu (Bâgiu 2006: 61). 'The poetry cultivated by Valeriu Anania belongs to the lyrical creators of religious artistry which is illustrated within the Romanian literature by Nichifor Crainic, Vasile Voiculescu, Ion Pillat, Tudor Arghezi and somewhat by Lucian Blaga [...] Valeriu Anania insisted upon congeniality, especially with Arghezi and Voiculescu. The first offered him the poetic skill, the art of the word, while the second offered him the equivalence between poetry and prayer' (Bâgiu 2006:8).⁵ The religious character can undoubtedly be recognized within this first volume of poetry entitled *Geneze*, published in 1971. The poems *Chrysalida* and *Agonie* from within this volume, indicate the unique religious style, proven by the first verses, originally written as „*Puternice, nu mă strivi!*” (Anania 1971:16) and „*Eli, Eli, Ce-nceată-ibiruința de-a muri!*” (Anania 1971:22) translated as 'Almighty, do not crush me' and 'Eli, Eli, How slow is the triumph over death'. Within the poet's following volume,

entitled *Anamneze*, the religious character predominates as well. Some of the theological, lyrical representations include *Axion*⁶, *Cununa*⁷ as well as *Masalui Brâncuși*⁸. Although the author uses the title and representation of Brâncuși's sculpted work of art, a parallel can be observed with the religious elements of the Christian Bible's Last Supper, where, as according to the Bible, the betrayal of one of the apostles was exposed.

In a first attempt to translate the poem *Masalui Brâncuși*, the main concern is to represent the poetic signification, an equivalent of the author's representation, through metaphor, to encode within the English language, what Anania had encoded in the Romanian language. In order to provide a faithful translation, the translator must first, decode the original signification of the source language text.

Aiming for a literary translation, in contrast to the word-for-word we can observe the semantic characteristics:

Din treisprezece câțieram la cină

Unu-a plecat și n-a mai vrut să vină. (Anania

1984:10)

translate as

'Of the thirteen present for supper

One had left and hadn't recovered.'

While the above is considered a literary translation, the following would be labeled as a word-for-word: 'From thirteen which we were at dinner/ One had left and did not want to return'. Firstly, choosing to translate 'cină' with the noun 'supper' instead of the noun 'dinner' proves an attempt to maintain a semantic equivalent, a sense for sense translation, rather than a word for word. Within the Merriam-Webster online Dictionary we can observe the definition of 'dinner' as being "a: the principal meal of the day; b. a formal feast or banquet", while 'supper' is defined as "a. the evening meal especially when dinner is taken midday; b. a social affair featuring a supper; especially: an evening social, especially for raising funds; a church supper". The last meal Jesus Christ shared with the apostles on big Thursday is known as the Last Supper, and, according to the Bible it had been taken in the evening, therefore the choice to use the noun 'supper' proves the intention to represent the signification linked to the Biblical event, as we will observe further on.

The introductory verses describe the image of thirteen individuals 'present for supper', referring to Brâncuși's *Table of Silence*, suggesting the twelve stone

³ "aduce în les nirea oferită de introducerile în cărțile biblice, belșugul de note și comentarii clarificatoare ale textului sfânt"

⁴ "Versiune diortosită după Septuaginta, redactată, adnotată și tipărită de Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania..."

⁵ "Poezia cultivată de Valeriu Anania aparține creatorilor lirici de vocație religioasă ilustrată în literatura română de Nichifor Crainic, Vasile Voiculescu, Ion Pillat, Tudor Argezi și întrucâtva de Lucian Blaga [...] Valeriu Anania a insistat asupra afinităților sale mai ales cu Arghezi și Voiculescu. Primul îi oferă ca model meșteșugul poetic, arta cuvântului, cel de-al doilea, echivalența dintre poezie și rugăciune"

⁶ (trans) Hymn of glory

⁷ (trans) The crown

⁸ (trans) The table of Brâncuși

round chairs of the sculpted artwork which surround the great stone round table. Within Anania's poetry 'The Table of Brâncuși' points out the chairs surrounding the table, as signifying the twelve apostles surrounding Jesus Christ during the Last Supper. Being originally named *Masa Tăcerii*, 'The table of silence', it could represent the silence before the storm, according to the signification Brâncuși offered it, the silence before the battle, before the war, but associating it with Anania's poem it could mean the silence before the Passions of the Christ, the Last Supper.

The author continues with the specification that 'one had left', referring to the apostle that had betrayed Jesus, by the name of Judas, as according to the Biblical narration. Although, *Unu-a plecat și n-a mai vrut să vină*, literally translates as 'One left and did not want to return', the choice to use the negation of the verb 'to recover' instead of 'not wanting to return', asides from the stylistic obligation of providing a rhymed equivalent, results from the implication of the original text's signification. As mentioned above, the one that 'had left' refers to the apostle Judas, whom, after betraying Jesus, hanged himself, not recovering from the sufferance of having sold Jesus Christ to the Pharisees.

The continuing verses are translated thus and also imply a parallel with the Bible's Last Supper:

Sufletpăros încuget agurid

*Cu noimuiase pâinea într-un blid,
pătrunsă-n miez și frântă și împărțită*

de omână albă, pururea-nflorită. (Anania 1984:10)

'Savage soul, bitter conscience

He once shared with us our pottage,

pierced in the crumb, broken and divided

by the everlasting hand, blossomed and enlightened.'

Although the expression *sufletpăros* literally means 'hairy soul', the choice to translate it as 'savage soul' is due to the signification of the expression in the Romanian language. Referring to the betrayal of the apostle, Judas, the poet uses the adjective *păros* 'hairy' to define the inhumanity of such an act, suggesting a beastly character of savage origin. The Romanian noun *cuget*, is defined as "thought, thinking, mind, conscience" (Bantaș, Nedelcu, Murar, & Bratu 2003:273). Thus, the choice to translate it as 'conscience' emphasizes the conscious character of the 'bitter' deed Judas, the apostle will have done, a deed enforced by the following expression, *cuget agurid* which literally means 'sour thought'. The Romanian term *agurid*

comes from the noun *aguridă* which, according to the dictionary means "the unripe sour grape, green/unripe fruit" (Bantaș, Nedelcu, Murar, & Bratu 2000:48) insinuating the un-sweetness, the bitterness of the betraying apostle's actions, the one who had 'once shared' with the rest of them, the 'pottage'.

The word-for-word translation of the above verse could be 'with us he dipped the bread into the dish' nevertheless, the attempt to translate in a literary manner resulted a slightly different exposure. The poetic translation suggests 'he once shared with us our pottage' using the noun 'pottage' which is archaic for 'dish' proving the equivalence with the Romanian term *blid* which is also archaic for the contemporary Romanian term *farfurie*⁹. The source language term *blid* as well as the target language term 'pottage' both refer to the dish, a vessel facilitating the act of sharing food, validating an initial close relationship between the poem's characters. Thus, once again we observe a parallel, an unmistakable resemblance with Judas, the betraying apostle, whom, in the beginning was considered the same as the rest of the apostles, benefiting from the same 'pottage', being satiated with the same 'Bread'. This is enforced by the narration from the Bible: *Nu numai cu pâine va trăi omul, ci cu tot cuvântul care iese din gura lui Dumnezeu, Matei 4:4* (Anania 2009: 1463).¹⁰ Due to his 'savage soul' Judas had sold their Teacher towards His death. The 'pottage' they had shared, at a higher level of interpretation could mean that it is a referral to the words of God, with which they were fed during their time with Jesus Christ.

The transitive verb 'enlighten' is used to translate the adjective *albă*, meaning 'white', which illustrates the 'hand'. As we can observe within the dictionary, 'enlighten' is the archaic term for illuminate (Webster, net), and within this translation, it aims to offer a faithful poetic equivalent: which in this case signifies the hand of God. The personifying epithet of the 'everlasting', 'blossomed' 'hand' materializes the presence of Divinity within the poem, a Divinity with a sacrificial character 'pierced, broken and divided' indicating the Crucifixion and Passions of Christ.

We can observe several possibilities of interpretation of the above mentioned verses:

1. At a first level of signification, Jesus Christ (described as 'the everlasting hand, blossomed and enlightened') shares with the apostles bread and wine during the Last Supper, 'dividing' the meal

⁹(trans) plate

¹⁰"One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" Matthew 4:4 (The Holy Bible, 1989)

between them, 'breaking' the bread to share with them his last meal, referring solely to the biblical narration of the Last Supper.

2. At a secondary level of signification, the 'pierced', 'broken', 'divided', 'crumb' refers to the sacrifice of the Son of God, to the actual Passions of Christ. The adjective 'pierced' refers to the action of the Roman soldier piercing the rib of Christ (*ci unul din ostași cu sulia coasta I-a împuns-oși îndată a ieși sânge și apă*) (Anania 2009:1580),¹¹ while the adjective 'divided' refers to the Biblical prophecy fulfillment: *Împărțit-au hainele mele lor, și pentru că masa Mea au aruncat sorți. Ioan 19:24* (Anania 2009:1580).¹²
3. A third level of interpretation can lead to the hypothesis that 'pierced in the crumb, broken and divided' refers to the contemporary ritual of the Christian church, the receiving of Eucharist within the Liturgy. The religious practice of receiving the Eucharist is "the Christian sacrament commemorating the Last Supper, in which bread and wine are consecrated and consumed" (Fowler & Fowler 1995:464).

The continuing stanza clarifies and proves the religious signification, supporting the poetic translation as well,

*Când ghicitoare a printrenoi se puse,
noi o ncercașinuma el tăcuse,
apoi s-a furișat, ca un răspuns
la inima-ntrebări ne ajuns* (Anania 1984:10)

'When asked to answer to the riddle
he was silenced, we strove a little,
thievishly, he seized the answer
in a manner, as an actor.'

We can observe a direct link to the events narrated in the Bible. The noun *ghicitoare*, translates as 'riddle' and recalls the biblical text "Adevăr, adevărvă spun că unul dintre voi Mă va vinde" (Anania 2009:1573).¹³ Jesus Christ does not clearly state which will be the traitor. In this case the verb *a vinde*¹⁴ can mean 'to betray', leaving the

apostles to question themselves, demonstrating the metaphoric use of *ghicitoare*, of 'riddle'. The following verse, 'he was silenced, we strove a little' refers to the apostles attempt to identify the corrupt one "*Deci Simon Petru-i-a făcut acești a semnii-a zis «Întreabă-L, cine este cel despre care vorbește?!» Ioan 13:24*" (Anania 2009:1573).¹⁵ The adverb 'thievishly', translates the original expression *s-a furișat* which literally means 'Which is done in secret, unnoticed', once more taking into consideration the parallel with the biblical text "*Și răspunzându-l, cel care L-a vîndut, I-a zis: «Nu cumva sunteu, Învățătorule?... Răspunsu-i-a Iisus: Tu ai zis.» Matei 26:25*" (Anania 2009:1491).¹⁶ The answer of Jesus Christ, found within the Bible 'You have said this yourself' supports the literary translation 'he seized the answer / in a manner, as an actor'.

Thus, the following two stanzas are further proof of the above mentioned parallels regarding the religiosity in Anania's poem *Masalui Brâncuși* improving also Anania's translation into verse of Brâncuși's sculpture.

*De ce-a plecat, de vreme ce gustase?
Semnu-ndoilei plânse și rămase.
La noi desăvârșireanu se-adapă
Din cerculștirb și roatașchioapă
O noapte grea venea de oareunde.* (Anania 1984:10)

'Why had he left, since he had tasted?
The sign of doubt, sorrowfully persisted.
Untaintedness, we cannot win

With half the battle or a wolf in sheepskin
A heavy night was now announced.'

Semnu-ndoilei plânse și rămase translated as 'the sign of doubt, sorrowfully persisted' reflects upon the fact that the rest of the apostles had remained troubled by the 'riddle', as established by the Bible's text "*Dar nimeni din cei ce sedeau la masă n'au înțeles pentru ce-i-a zis aceasta;*" *Ioan 13:28* (Anania 2009:1573).¹⁷ Further on, the two metaphors *cerculștirb* and *roatașchioapă* translate as 'half the battle' and 'wolf in sheepskin' and aim to decipher and encode the importance of truth and authenticity that *adapă*, that 'feeds'

¹¹ „Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out” John 19:34 (The Holy Bible, 1989)

¹² “They divided my clothes among themselves and for my clothing they cast lots.” John 19:24 (The Holy Bible, 1989)

¹³ “Very truly I Tell you, one of you will betray me.” John 13:21 (The Holy Bible, 1989)

¹⁴ (trans) to sell

¹⁵ “Simon Peter therefore motioned to him: to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, „Lord who is it?” John 13:24-25 (The Holy Bible, 1989)

¹⁶ “Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” He replied, “You have said so.” Matthew 26:25 (The Holy Bible, 1989)

¹⁷ “Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him” Matthew 13:28 (The Holy Bible, 1989)

the 'untainted', as according to the Christian ideology. The Romanian verb *aadapa* literally means to 'quench the thirst of most commonly farm animals, "to water, to give smb. To drink" (Bantaş, Nedelcu, Murar, & Bratu 2003:28) or figuratively, to saturate, to fill up, originating from the noun *apă* which means 'water'. The doubled metaphor of a 'wolf in sheepskin' trying to conquer 'untaintedness' through 'half the battle' displays the poetic, English equivalent of the Romanian archaic metaphors, *cercușul tîrîb* and *roatașchioapă* which by literal translation mean 'the toothless circle' and 'limping tire'. The 'heavy night was now announced' intends to translate, in a literary manner, the meaning of the original *O noapte grea venea de oareunde*. The verb in the past tense *venea* although literally meaning 'was coming' is translated through 'was announced', while the adjective 'heavy' is the literal equivalent of *grea*. The choice to translate the past tense Romanian verb *venea*, using the past tense English verb, 'announced', rather than 'was coming' is sustained by Biblical text "Atunci Iisus le-a zis: «În această noapte, voi toți vă veți poticni întru Mine, că scrieste: Bate voia păstorului se vor risipi oiile turmei.»" Matei 26:31 (Anania 2009:1492),¹⁸ in which Jesus announces the horrific events that will take place, described through the adjective 'heavy' with its semantic sense: "difficult to bear; specifically: causing or characterized by severe pain or suffering/ a heavy sorrow" (Merriam-Webster, net).

The following stanzas conclude with a clear religious representation of the poetic signification:

*Și-n jurul mesei joase și rotunde
pescaune ne-am strâns cu vechiul rost
șilocu lăude odă n-a mai fost.*

*O noaptea grea se cuibări-n unghere
Ospățul pietre de venea tăcere.* (Anania 1984: 10)

Translated as:

'The low round table we surrounded,
we took our seats, our olden' service,
his seat, asudden, occurred vanished

A heavy night huddled to surface
The rocketh feast grew into silence.'

¹⁸ "Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night: for it is written. 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'" Matthew 26:31 (The Holy Bible, 1989)

and mainly refer to the disappearance of the betraying apostle, whose 'seat' had 'vanished', concluding the previous verses. By bringing into discussion the 'low, round table', as well as a 'rocketh feast', Anania suggests a Christian conversion of Brâncuși's sculpture, through the poetic representation. The repeated verses 'a heavy night was now announced' and 'a heavy night huddled to surface' enforce the suggestion as well as the prediction of the Passions of Christ, replacing the initial signification of the sculpted work. Moreover, *ospățul pietre* translated as 'the rocketh feast' portrays a feast surrounding a table which was originally constructed to represent the gathering before a battle, before a tragedy. Transposing this signification, Anania suggests the 'rocketh feast' anticipating, not a worldly battle between humans, but the Crucifixion of a single Man, the One surrounded by their 'seats' and 'service'.

Regarding the morphological perspective, the repeated pronoun observed throughout the poem: 'He once shared with us our pottage', 'we strove' 'Untaintedness, we cannot win', 'The low round table we surrounded' and finally we took our seats, our olden service' suggests a personal implication. The narrator, the poet, includes himself in the poetic representation, he considers himself as being part of the 'round table' part of the 'rocketh feast'. This personal implication, highlights two possible interpretations:

1. Starting from the premise of biographical criticism, we can uncover a source of inspiration in the life and experiences of the poet, suggesting that the poetic image he created can refer to his arrest and imprisonment by the communist government. Within the poet's published *Memorii*¹⁹ we can observe his premonition regarding the 'heavy night' that was 'announced': 'The communist authority will take me anyway, either through Veniamin, if he does not resist interrogation, either through Bica, which is also arrested, either through doctor Veselovschi if he's alive in some jail, the owner of the package which was given to Arghezi' (Anania 2011:249).²⁰ The 'heavy night' that was 'announced' can also refer to the communist party,

¹⁹ (trans) Memoirs

²⁰ „Securitatea va ajunge la mine oricum, fie prin Veniamin, dacă acesta nu va rezista la interogatorii, fie prin Bica, și el arestat, fie-dacă trăiește și s'o fi aflând prin vreo pușcărie-prin doctorul Veselovschi, proprietarul pachetului, cel care i-l încredinșase lui Arghezi”

which, according to his written memoirs, hunted him continuously ('Anania?...We will put our hands on this bandit!')(Anania2011:249)).²¹

2. A second possible interpretation refers to the poet's lifelong activity as a monk, beginning from a young age, suggesting that he, through his "vows especially of poverty, chastity and obedience" (Fowler & Fowler 1995:879), through Communion, through Eucharist, just as the apostles, 'shared', preached the words of Christ, the 'pottage', referring to food for the soul, considering himself just like the apostles, or as any other Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ. Therefore, by inserting himself at Brâncuși's 'round' 'table' (we took our seats, our olden service') he confirms the similitude of his work, as a monk, with the ones that previously 'shared' the 'pottage' from 'the everlasting hand, blossomed and enlightened'.

In conclusion, Anania's poem offers a wide range of signifiers and significations, entwining and translating the sculpted artwork through religious elements into a poetic exemplar. The poem, not only flourishes through an interdisciplinary representation valuing the elements of the Brâncuși ensemble, but it also portrays the author's view on Juda's, the apostle, act of betrayal: 'Untaintedness, we cannot win / With half the battle or a wolf in sheepskin'.

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²¹ „Anania?... Punemnoi mâna pe banditul ăsta !”